

are not considered here) is probably “evolution towards recognition.” Hospital based structures are numerous and diverse. Willingness is often the basis of their activities, and their composition and methods are very varied. Some of those structures provide consultation and participate in the decision-making processes at some stage when they are requested to do so, while others are reluctant to be involved. The incorporation in law of regional structures dealing with ethical reflections raises issues about the evolution of such structures: some of them may become obsolete, while others may evolve with new regional responsibilities. This recent addition in the public health act is revolutionary—it creates officially new ethical bodies supported by public funds.

The issue of turning healthcare ethics into a profession, or several professions, clearly needs to be raised in a country where so far the word “ethicist” is very seldom used and has not been defined. The ideal in my view would be a strict understanding of the new law in its application—that is, placing the activities of the regional Espaces éthique in a supportive role, with a possible direct participation in ethical debates by their future members, while avoiding classical ethics consultations. The role and skills of their future members should be in the fields of organisation and observation. They should not pretend embody the essence of ethical decision-making, which primarily belongs to those who are directly involved.

In relation to ethics consultation activities, these require close observation and evaluation of their functions, but systematic work may be difficult as there has been no satisfactory record of the structures involved and of their activities in France up to now, unlike in several other European countries. However, such an evaluation calls for more reflection on the decision-making processes within

hospitals, carried out by working teams. Failure to understanding this may create situations where such a service only covers matters that could have been resolved if they had been thoroughly identified.^{12–16}

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